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ABSTRACT

This special Kids Count report compares the current well-being of Kansas children to that of children in other states. The statistical portrait is based on a composite rank and 10 indicators of child well-being: (1) percent low birthweight infants; (2) infant mortality rate; (3) child death rate; (4) teen death rate by accident, homicide, and suicide; (5) teen birth rate; (6) percent teens who are high school dropouts; (7) percent teens not attending school and not working; (8) percent children living with parents who do not have full-time, year-round employment; (9) percent of children living in poverty; and (10) percent of families with children headed by a single parent. Following introductory remarks noting that the events of September 11, 2001 motivate efforts to strengthen communities and the state through increased commitment to children, this report details current indicator data for Kansas and provides information on Kansas' rank in comparison to other states, to the best state in the nation, and to the best neighboring state. The report then quantifies improvements needed to match the best state. Findings indicate that, based on a composite ranking of all states, Kansas ranked seventeenth in 1998, in comparison to New Hampshire with the best composite rank and neighboring Iowa with a rank of six. Three strategies are presented to achieve the vision that Kansas children have the best opportunities in which to grow and thrive: (1) invite other individuals and state organizations to adopt this vision as their own; (2) listen to what children and youth say they need; and (3) become advocates for children and youth. The report concludes with a description of the work, mission, and funding sources for the Kansas Action for Children, Inc. (KB)

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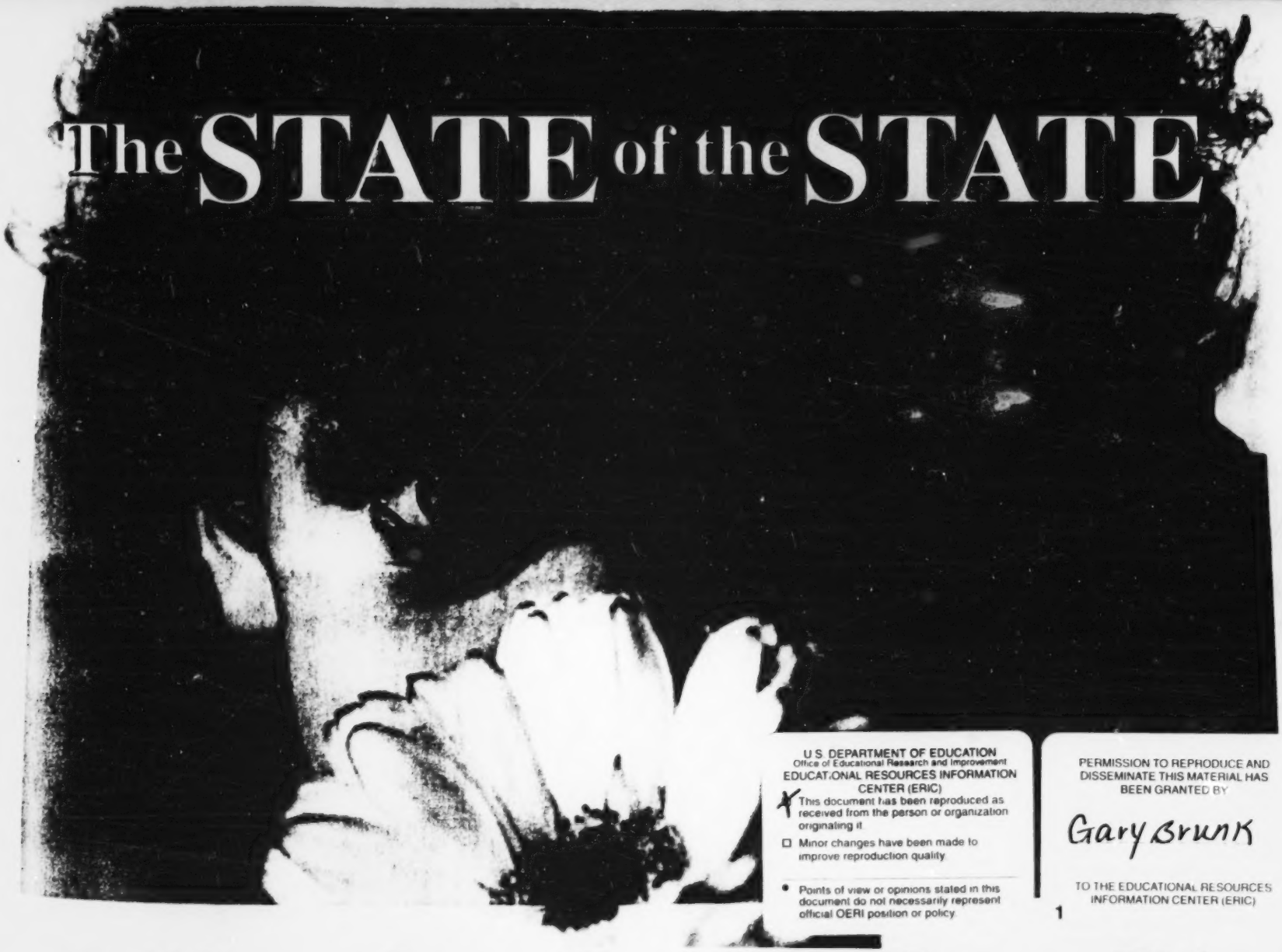
The STATE of the STATE



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Building a Better Future for Kansas Kids

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The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and America have touched each of us in immeasurable ways.

As adults, many of us are thinking more about those things that matter most – family, friends, our faith. As citizens, we have been motivated by the example of the brave men and women of the New York fire and police departments to look at how we can help strengthen our communities and our state.

To improve our communities and our state, we need to start by articulating an inspiring vision. The vision of Kansas Action for Children is that our children will have the best opportunities in the nation in which to grow and thrive. Why should that be our vision?

- Because while our children comprise 27 percent of our population, they make up 100 percent of our future.
- Because if Kansas is to be prepared for the challenges of the new millennium, we need strong, healthy, well-educated young people.
- Because, if we focus, we have the ability to reach this vision.
- Because our children deserve no less.

Working to ensure that Kansas children will have the best opportunities in the nation in which to grow and thrive does not mean that we want children in Kansas to have greater opportunities than children elsewhere. In a very profound way, our best hope for a safe and prosperous future is a world where

These are times to become focused on the greater good, and making Kansas the best state in the nation in which to raise a child seems a worthy goal.

children everywhere receive the physical and emotional nurture needed for healthy development.

But as citizens of Kansas, *our* opportunity is to work to make our state the best in the nation.

If that vision inspires other states to compete with us in a race to improve child well-being, how much better to put our resources behind that race than behind many other competitions that often dominate our attention.

Many Kansans think that our state is already a good place to raise children. It is, but it can be better. As the events of September 11th underscore, these are not times for complacency. These are times to become focused on the greater good, and making Kansas the best state in the nation in which to raise a child seems a worthy goal.

The following information will give you an idea as to where Kansas stands in relationship to other states and what we need to do to reach our goal. As you will learn, we are not as bad as many states and not as good as some. There are areas in which Kansas can do much better. There are areas where we are doing pretty well. These benchmarks give us a way to measure our movement toward reaching our vision.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILD AND YOUTH WELL-BEING WOULD HELP ENSURE THAT OUR CHILDREN HAVE THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NATION IN WHICH TO GROW AND THRIVE?

A helpful way to answer the question is to actually quantify the improvements we need to make in child and youth well-being to be as good as the state that is currently the best in the nation.

We can compare ourselves to the best state in the nation using the annual national KIDS COUNT state-by-state evaluation of child and youth well-being. KIDS COUNT uses 10 indicators of child and youth well-being, and all 50 states are ranked by each indicator.

In what follows, we use KIDS COUNT data to compare Kansas to the best state in the nation and to the best neighboring state; we then quantify the improvements needed to match the best state.

PERCENT OF LOW-BIRTH-WEIGHT BABIES

Newborns weighing less than 5.5 pounds at birth are considered low-birth-weight babies. Low-birth-weight babies have a high probability of experiencing health and developmental problems, and their risk of dying during the first year of life is 20 times higher than for babies of normal birth weight.

In 1998, 7 percent of babies born in Kansas – 2,691 babies – weighed less than 5.5 pounds. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked 18th in the nation. The best state was Oregon, where 5.4 percent of newborns were of low birth weight. The best neighboring state was Iowa, whose 6.4 percent low-birth-weight babies resulted in a national ranking of 10th.

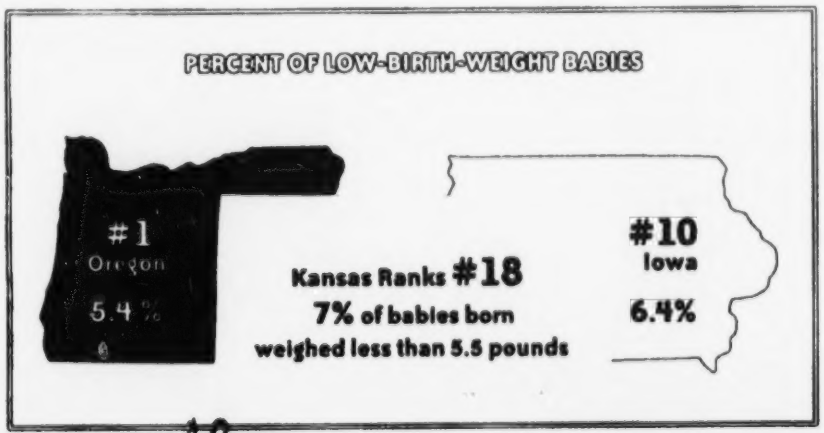
For Kansas to match Oregon on this indicator of child well-being, we would have to reduce the number of low-birth-weight babies by 615.

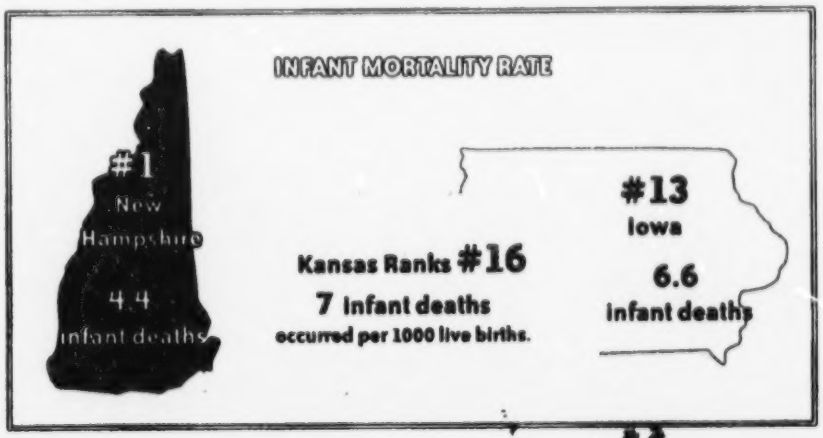
INFANT MORTALITY RATE

The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths occurring to infants less than 1 year old per 1,000 live births during the year. A key factor in reducing the overall infant mortality rate is improving access to perinatal and other preventive health-care services. Not surprisingly, the infant mortality rate is significantly higher among low-income families, in part because of less access to health care.

In 1998, seven infant deaths occurred per 1,000 live births in Kansas, a total of 270 infant deaths. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked 16th in the nation. The best state was New Hampshire, with a rate of 4.4 infant deaths. The best neighboring state was Iowa, whose rate of 6.6 per 1,000 live births resulted in a ranking of 13.

Kansas would rank as high as New Hampshire if we reduced the number of infant deaths by 100.





Based on miles driven, teenage drivers are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as are all drivers.

CHILD DEATH RATE

The child death rate is the number of deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 14, for all causes. Unintentional injuries such as drowning and motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among this age group. It is estimated that approximately 90 percent of such injuries are preventable.

In 1998, there were 29 child deaths per 100,000 children in Kansas, a total of 154 deaths. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked 36th in the nation. The best state was Massachusetts, with a rate of 11 per 100,000. The best neighboring states were Colorado and Nebraska, whose rate of 23 per 100,000 resulted in a tied rank of 19.

For Kansas to rank as high as Massachusetts, we would have to reduce the number of child deaths by 96.

RATE OF TEEN DEATHS BY ACCIDENT, HOMICIDE AND SUICIDE

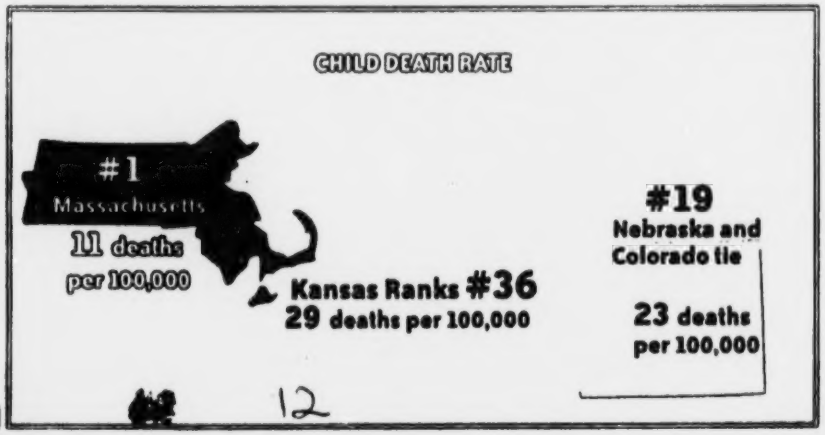
The rate of teen deaths by accident, homicide and suicide is the number of deaths from these causes per 100,000 teenagers between ages 15 and 19. In Kansas, the leading cause of teen violent death is motor vehicle accidents. Based on miles driven, teenage drivers are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as are all drivers.

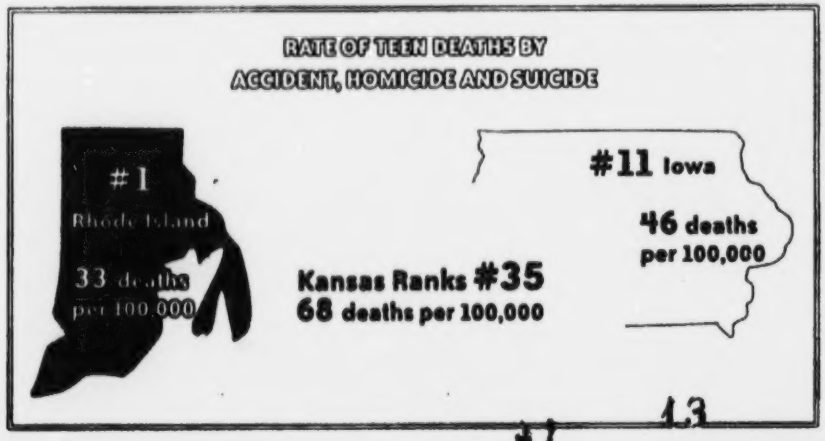
In 1998, there were 68 teen violent deaths per 100,000 15- to 19-year-olds in Kansas, a total of 143 deaths. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked 35th in the nation. The best state in the nation was Rhode Island, with a rate of 33 per 100,000. The best neighboring state was Iowa, whose rate of 46 per 100,000 placed it 11th among all states.

For Kansas to rank as high as Rhode Island, we would have to reduce the number of teen violent deaths by 74.

TEEN BIRTH RATE

The teen birth rate is the number of births to teenagers between the ages of 15 and





Because teen mothers may have difficulty providing the material and emotional support that children need and the fathers are often absent from their lives, babies born to young teenagers are starting life with greatly diminished opportunities.

17 per 1,000 females in this age group. Because teen mothers may have difficulty providing the material and emotional support that children need and the fathers are often absent from their lives, babies born to young teenagers are starting life with greatly diminished opportunities.

In 1998, there were 25 teen births per 1,000 15- to 17-year-old females in Kansas, a total of 1,528 births. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked 22nd in the nation. The best state in the nation was Vermont, with a rate of 11 per 1,000. The best neighboring state was Iowa, which ranked seventh with a rate of 19 per 1,000.

Kansas would rank as high as Vermont if we reduced the number of teen births by 856.

PERCENT OF TEENS WHO ARE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

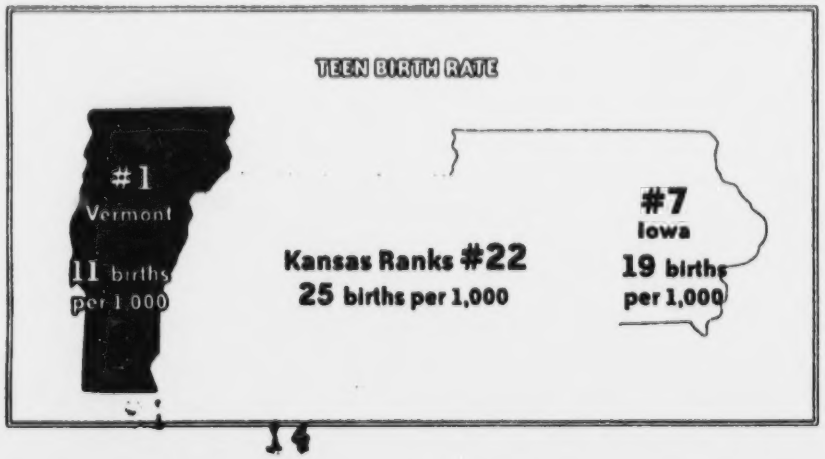
The percent of teens who are high school dropouts is the percentage of teenagers ages 16 to 19 who are not enrolled in school and are not high school graduates. In today's economy, young people who do not have at least a high school education will likely face a lifetime of economic insecurity.

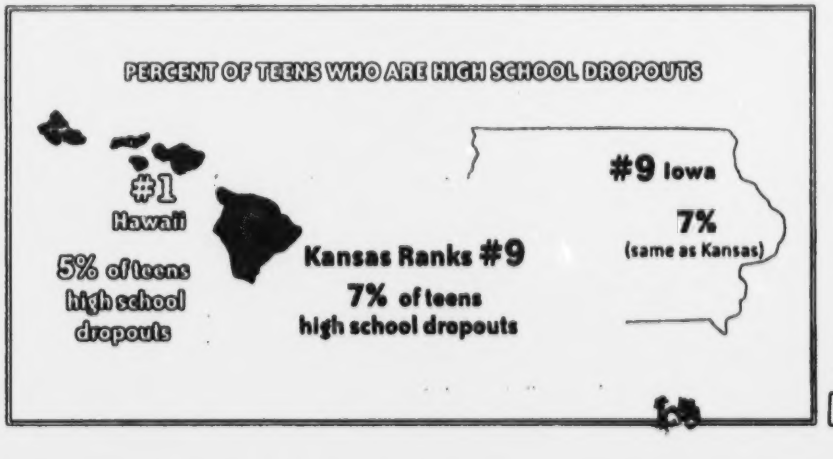
In 1998, 7 percent of teens in Kansas – 12,000 teens – were high school dropouts. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked ninth in the nation. The best state in the nation was Hawaii, where 5 percent of teens were dropouts. Among neighboring states, Iowa had the same percent of dropouts as Kansas.

To rank as high as Hawaii, Kansas would have to reduce the number of dropouts by 3,429.

PERCENT OF TEENS NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND NOT WORKING

The percent of teens not attending school and not working is the percentage of teenagers ages 16 to 19 who are not enrolled in school and who are not employed. These





In 1998, 20 percent of children in Kansas – 136,000 children – lived with parents who did not have full-time, year-round employment. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked ninth in the nation.

young people are not gaining essential work experience and may have difficulty finding and keeping employment in the future.

In 1998, 6 percent of teens in Kansas – 10,000 teens – were not attending school and not working. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked seventh in the nation. The best state in the nation was Iowa, where 4 percent of teens were not in school and not employed. Among neighboring states, Nebraska had the same percent of idle teens as Kansas.

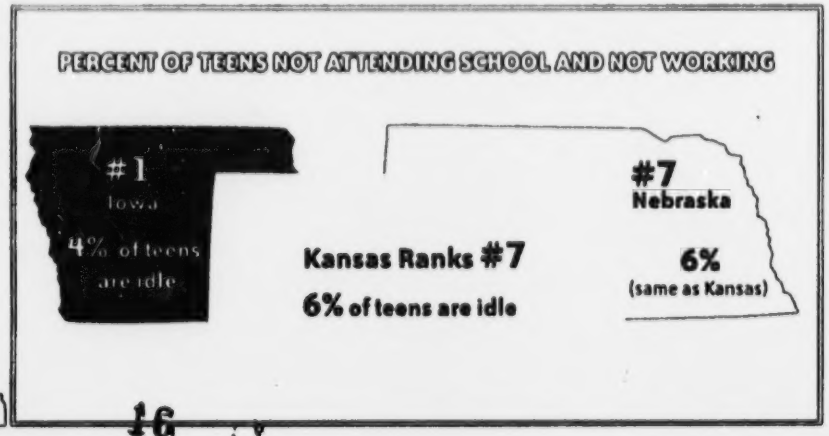
Kansas would rank as high as Iowa if we reduced the number of idle teens by 3,333.

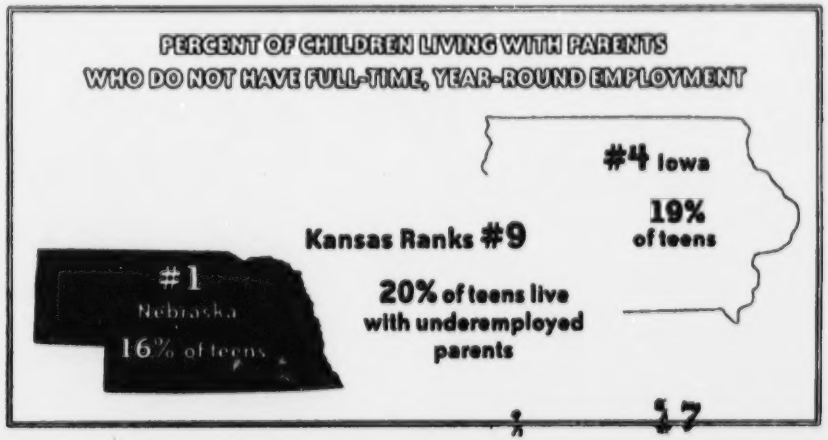
PERCENT OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH PARENTS WHO DO NOT HAVE FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYMENT

The percent of children living with parents who do not have full-time, year-round employment is the percentage of all children under age 18 living in families where parents do not have regular employment. These children are at risk of not reaching their full potential because, among other things, they are likely to be poor and may have an unstable home life because their parents must work several jobs at odd hours.

In 1998, 20 percent of children in Kansas – 136,000 children – lived with parents who did not have full-time, year-round employment. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked ninth in the nation. The best state in the nation was Nebraska, where 16 percent of children lived with underemployed parents. Once again, the best neighboring state was Iowa, whose 19 percent of children living with underemployed parents placed it fourth nationally.

To rank as high as Nebraska, Kansas would have to reduce the number of children living with underemployed parents by 27,200.





PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY

The percent of children in poverty is the percent of children under age 18 who live in families with incomes below the U.S. poverty threshold. Poor children are at greater risk of health problems, developmental delays, repeated school years, lower test scores and adult poverty.

In 1998, 15 percent of children in Kansas – 109,300 children – were living in poverty. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked eighth in the nation. The best state in the nation was New Hampshire, where 10 percent of children lived in poverty. The best neighboring state was Nebraska, whose 13 percent of children living in poverty resulted in a rank of two.

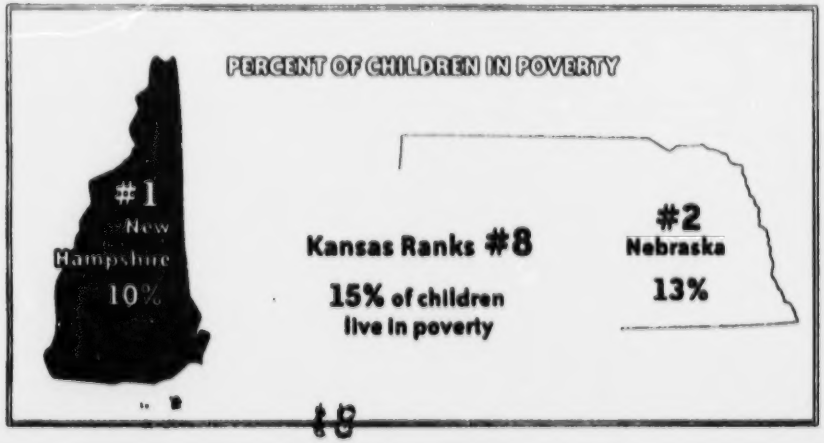
For Kansas to rank as high as New Hampshire, we would have to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 36,433.

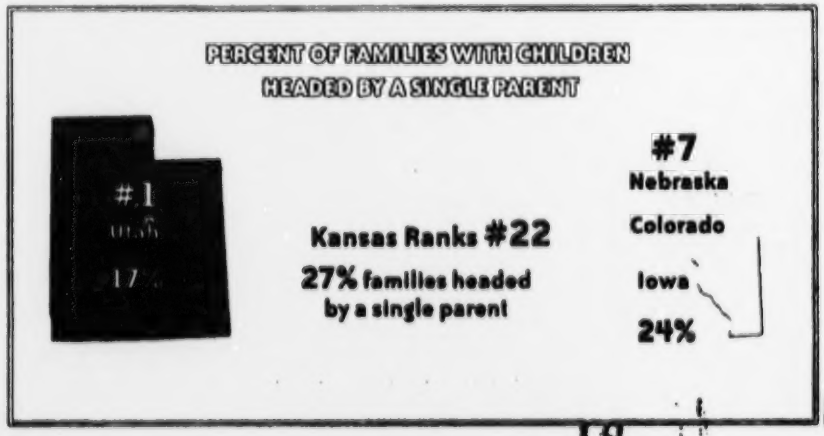
PERCENT OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN HEADED BY A SINGLE PARENT

The percent of families with children headed by a single parent is the percentage of families with children under age 18 living in households that are headed by a person without a spouse present in the home. Among other risks, children in single-parent families are at greater risk of poverty.

In 1998, 27 percent of families with children in Kansas – 96,000 families – were headed by a single parent. Compared to other states, Kansas ranked 22nd in the nation. The best state in the nation was Utah, where 17 percent of families with children were headed by a single parent. The best neighboring states were Colorado, Iowa and Nebraska, whose 24 percent resulted in a tied rank of seven.

Kansas would rank as high as Utah if we reduced the number of families headed by single parents by 35,556.





Few things are more important to a child's healthy development than a strong relationship with one or more adults. To make Kansas the best state, adults must get involved with children and youth.

NATIONAL KIDS COUNT COMPOSITE RANK

KIDS COUNT calculates a composite ranking of all the states. In 1998, Kansas ranked 17th in the nation. New Hampshire had the best composite rank in the nation, and Iowa was the best neighboring state, with a rank of six.

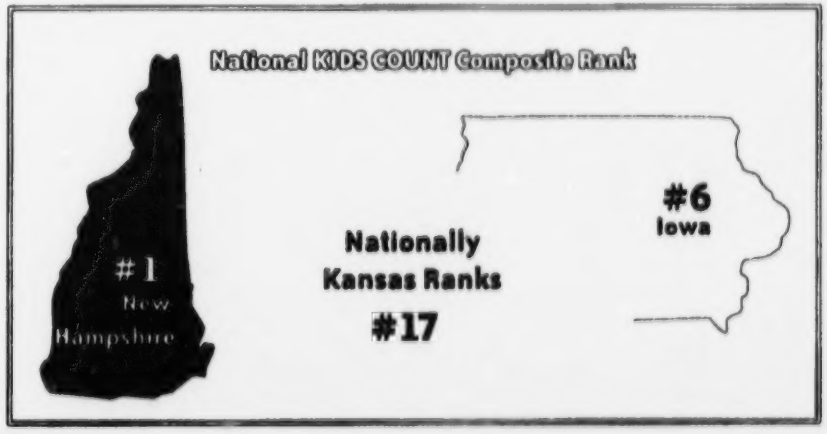
HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THE VISION THAT KANSAS CHILDREN HAVE THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NATION IN WHICH TO GROW AND THRIVE?

First, we invite other individuals and organizations in the state to adopt this vision as their own. If our elected officials, state agencies, private philanthropy, ordinary citizens, communities, young people, local boards of education and others adopted this vision, we would all be headed in the same direction. This does not mean that everyone needs to do the same thing, but rather that they have the same end in mind as they do what they do.

Second, we must listen to what children and young people are telling us they need. Recently, 3,500 Kansas grade school and high school students responded to the question, "What is it you need from adults to grow up healthy and safe?" Our children and youth said:

- We need parents and other adults actively engaged in our lives.
- We need adults to spend time with us and to listen to us.
- We need adults to provide guidance and discipline, set boundaries for our behavior and support appropriate risk-taking.
- We want unconditional love, acceptance and respect.
- We need to feel safe and secure.
- We need support from adults.

The needs expressed by Kansas children



and youth in their answers are supported by much of the research on healthy child and youth development. These young people intuitively understand what the research shows. Few things are more important to a child's healthy development than a strong relationship with one or more adults. To make Kansas the best state, adults must get involved *with* children and youth.

Third, adults must become advocates *for* children and youth. State and local policy has a big impact on child well-being, but children do not vote. Clean and well-equipped parks, affordable and quality child care and good schools are all the result of public investments for the common good. To make sure that we continue making these investments, more citizens will need to speak out for our children.

Because Kansas *is* a good place to raise children, it is worth remembering that goodness can be the biggest barrier to greatness. If we adopt the vision, get involved *with* children, and become advocates *for* children, Kansas children *will* have the best opportunities in the nation in which to grow and thrive.

Kansas kids count Action For Children Inc.

OUR WORK

Kansas Action for Children is an independent, nonpartisan, citizen-based corporation founded in 1979. We do not enter into contracts with, nor receive funding from, government agencies. We work on behalf of all children to ensure that their physical and emotional needs are met, and that they become healthy and contributing adults.

- We *paint the picture* of Kansas children by gathering and publicizing data on child well-being through the *Kansas Children's Report Card*, the *Kansas KIDS COUNT Data Book* and special reports.
- We *advance alternatives* by developing state policy that is child, youth and family friendly. Over the years, programs related to early childhood development, teen pregnancy, preventive health care, citizen's review boards, services to children in troubled families and the use of funds from the legal settlement with tobacco companies have stemmed from our work.
- We *build the base* of citizen advocacy for children and youth by working with citizens and organizations across the state. We believe that hundreds of citizens speaking out for children can help create communities that support families and children.

OUR MISSION

Kansas Action for Children advocates for policies and programs that ensure and improve the physical, emotional and educational well-being of all Kansas children and youth. KAC is an independent and nonpartisan voice on their behalf.

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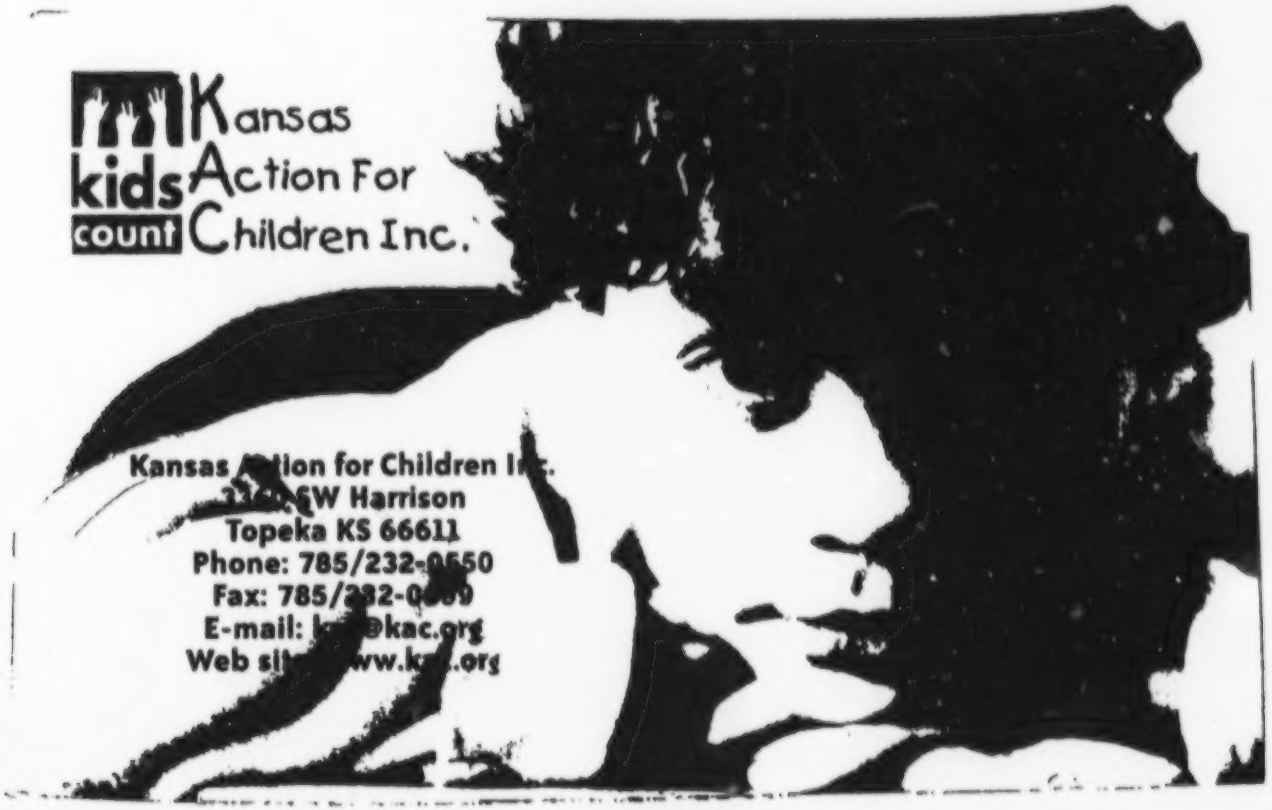

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